Standard Guidelines for the Operation of Chinchilla Ranches

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Preface

Domestication and artificial selection of livestock have made farm animals dependent on humans. Consequently, according to the currently accepted moral and ethical standards of our society, humans have no choice but to accept this dependence as a commitment to practice humane conduct toward domestic animals and to prevent avoidable suffering at all stages of their lives. These voluntary guidelines represent a step toward meeting that commitment.

These guidelines are intended to be used by the chinchilla fur industry, scientists, and animal-welfare groups as an educational tool in the promotion of sound husbandry and welfare practices. The recommendations do not claim to be comprehensive for all circumstances, but they attempt to define high standards of chinchilla production and well-being in commercial, research, educational, and other ranch operations.

These guidelines can serve operators in the various sectors of the fur industry to compare or improve their own managerial routines. It should be understood that new scientific discoveries and changing economic conditions may make revisions of these Guidelines necessary from time to time.

It should be noted that minimum pen sizes are based on current ranching practices. No published research was available when these guidelines were drafted.

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Definition

The chinchilla is a member of the rodent family and in its wild state is an the endangered species list. Wild chinchillas are native to the Andes mountains region of South America. Ranched chinchillas are raised world wide for the production of fur.

Through countless generations of selective breeding for fur quality, fecundity, colour, size, and growth rate, the ranch-raised chinchilla is vastly improved in quality over its wild counterpart. Good nutrition, clean, ventilated housing, stress free environment, and veterinary care have resulted in a calm, ranch raised animal that is dependent on the humane rancher for survival.

In this document "chinchilla" refers to the ranch-raised variety and not to its wild counterpart.

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Introduction

These operating guide have been prepared for the benefit of ranch-raised chinchillas and the chinchilla fur industry worldwide.

These guidelines are designed to assist ranchers in providing a humane environment for their animals. Consideration was given to the physical and psychological needs of the captive chinchillas The guidelines were prepared by leaders in the chinchilla fur farming industry, and professionals in the fields of veterinary medicine, animal nutrition, and animal care and control.

It is the sincere hope that chinchilla ranchers will study and adhere to the high standards set out herein. This will greatly benefit their animals and the fur industry as a whole. Ranchers who are certified will be publicly recognized. Certification procedures are set out on page 18.

We proudly submit these self-regulatory guidelines to chinchilla ranchers worldwide. We commend you for your commitment to excellence in ranch management and your vigilant attention to the maintenance of these humane standards.

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Section 1 - Management

The humane raising of chinchilla is entirely dependent upon the skill, training, and integrity of the chinchilla ranch manager/owner.

Ranch-raised animals depend entirely upon the ranch environment and the ranch manager. These practices emphasize the prime importance of good management, which is the key factor in the welfare of all livestock.

The manager must have a basic knowledge of chinchilla welfare, including familiarity with normal chinchilla behaviour, as well as knowing about proper husbandry and handling procedures.

Management must be so designed that the welfare of the chinchilla is the first consideration, whatever system is used.

The manager must see that routines are set up, imposed and followed. The system must provide for the cleanliness and comfort of the animals. It must facilitate regular feeding and watering as well as permitting effective animal inspection.

The entire herd should be generally inspected on a daily basis. Breeding animals require close individual inspection daily.

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Section 2 - Accommodation

Chinchilla unit

Any building used to house chinchillas must permit clean, airy, hygienic conditions, and at the same time afford protection from the elements. There are almost as many chinchilla unit designs as there are chinchilla ranches; therefore it is recommended that the rancher visit several ranches or farms and inspect their designs for adaptation to his/her needs.

1. Units may be used specifically to house stock kept for breeding or pelting, or for a combination of both.
2. Chinchillas should not be housed in buildings with any other livestock.
3. The chinchilla unit should (through natural or artificial light) give the chinchilla a sense of natural day/night light cycle.
4. Chinchillas should be kept in housing or units that will give them adequate protection from elements. There must be the necessary equipment, in good working condition, to heat or cool the unit as needed. The unit average temperature range should be kept between 55°F - 80°F. (13° - 27°C).
5. Aisles or passageways between rows of cages should allow sufficient space to operate feed carts and to allow access for ease of cleaning, maintenance, and animal management.
6. The unit should have some ambient noise of non-disturbing nature. A totally quiet area is not recommended as it may stress the animals.
7. The unit should be designed and maintained in such a manner to prevent undesirable animals from coming into and living in the unit. Undesirable animals include, mice, rats, birds, bats and flies.
8. The number of animals in a unit should be kept to a number that will allow enough room for proper maintenance and management as well as fresh air. With ideal air circulation and cage design the population density could reach up to one (1) square foot of floor space, or eight (8) cubic feet of room space per animal. An example would be three thousand (3000) animals in a thirty-eight-foot by eighty-foot room with an eight (8) foot ceiling (38'x 80'x 8').
9. Air circulation and fresh air is needed inside the chinchilla unit. Air circulation throughout the unit is required to keep bedding dry and animals comfortable. Air circulation needs to be evenly distributed throughout the unit without drafts on individual animals. Fresh air should be brought into the unit as necessary. The air in the unit should be fresh and free from ammonia odours.
10. The unit should be maintained in a degree of cleanliness that promotes safe work areas, inhibits disease growth, and keeps the animals at a reasonable level of comfort.

Caging

Chinchilla cages must provide sufficient area for the animals to exercise, to defecate, and in the case of breeding pens, to rear young. The animal must be able to stretch and move about comfortably within the cage. The materials used to build a cage may vary but the following requirements must be met.

1. Cages should be of sufficient size to pro-mote the general welfare of the animal.

   Breeder pens must have a minimum of two thousand, two hundred (2200) cubic inches. Weaner cages must be a minimum of one thousand five hundred (1500) cubic inches. These are not presented as optimum sizes; many breeders prefer cages somewhat larger than these minimum requirements.
2. All cages must be designed to allow sufficient air movement through the cage.
3. The breeder cage should not have mesh or other holes larger than one half (1/2) inch in width.
4. The cage should be sturdy and free of sharp edges or nails that may cause injury to an animal.
5. The breeder cage should allow ease of access for the male chinchilla to enter the breeder cage safety. The access should be able to close and open easily.
6. When wire-bottom cages are used, it is recommended that the animal is supplied with some solid object so it can rest off the wire.
7. In every cage, a watering device, such as a water bottle or automatic watering nipple, and a feeding device, such as a feed trough or bowl, must be available so as to permit easy access by the chinchilla and for inspection cleaning, as required.
8. Some method of sandbathing the animal must be provided and made available to the animal at least once every two weeks. When the humidity exceeds sixty (60) percent, sandbathing should be

made available at least every week.
9. Cages should be cleaned on a regular basis to repress disease, fungus growth, urine odour, animal stain, and to provide a healthy enjoyable environment for the chinchilla.

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Section 3 - Feed and Water

Feed

The manager should study the general nutritional requirements of the chinchilla.

1. Chinchillas should never be fed any feed that has been contaminated by vermin, pesticide, spray, or molds.
2. A quality mixed feed ration should be obtained from a qualified source.
3. If feeds are supplemented with hay, care should be taken to feed a good, quality clean hay, free of molds and insecticides. Hay should be stored in a manner to prevent vermin contamination.
4. It is important to store feed in such in a manner that it does not become contaminated by vermin.
5. Bags of feed should not be placed directly on a cement or moist dirt floor. A separate room, or area in the animal room may be set aside for proper feed storage. Feed bags may be protected from dampness by putting them on a wooden pallet.

Feed Distribution

Sufficient feed must be given at all times to ensure the health and well-being of the chinchilla.

1. Feed should be placed in such a position that the chinchilla can easily reach it. This is particularly important with young animals.
2. Pellets should be fed in suitable feed containers. Feeders should be cleaned out on a regular basis.
3. Chinchillas should be fed on a regular schedule, depending on the type of feeder and cage that is used. An animal kept on wire will need to be fed more frequently than an animal housed on shavings.

Watering Systems

The chinchilla producer must ensure that clean safe water is available to the chinchilla at all times.

1. Many modern ranches use an automatic watering system. Care should be taken so the system remains clean and that the individual valves or nipples do not become blocked.
2. Regular maintenance should be carried out to prevent leaking of valves and connections, which could cause wet areas or flooded cages.
3. Bottles are also an acceptable method of watering chinchillas. A regular maintenance and cleaning schedule should be implemented to keep the bottles clean.

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Section 4 - Health and Disease

The chinchilla rancher must always be aware of the condition of the herd and be able to recognize signs of a distressed or ill animal.

1. There is no requirement to be an expert on chinchilla diseases, but the rancher should have a working relationship with a knowledgeable veterinarian or an experienced chinchilla rancher who is willing and able to give sound advice.
2. It is important that the chinchilla rancher develop an ability to observe the chinchilla closely in order to detect any abnormalities of behaviour, posture, or other indication of ill health. Appropriate treatment should be given immediately.

3. The rancher should pay particular attention to the droppings of the chinchilla, which is an excellent indicator of the animal's health.
4. No unexplained death(s) should go uninvestigated by post mortem examination.

Stress

Stress is very harmful to the chinchilla and can cause health problems and/or damaged fur. Every effort should be taken to relieve any stressful conditions in the chinchilla unit. Generally a clean, well-ventilated area with clean fresh water and feed and no sudden or extremely loud noises will provide a nonstressful suitable environment for the chinchilla.

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Section 5 - Sanitation

A chinchilla rancher must impose effective hygenic and sanitary programs to avoid conditions that are unpleasant or harmful for the animals.

1. Cages should be cleaned on a regular schedule to prevent stressful conditions for the animals, to keep urine odour to a minimum, and prevent stains on the animals.
2. The chinchilla unit should be kept well ventilated to help prevent the spread of disease and to keep the unit fresh between cleanings. Ventilation will help minimize the smell of ammonia, which can have serious side effects on the chinchillas.
3. It is essential that an effective vector control be implemented, as mice and rats can carry communicable diseases to chinchillas.
4. Domestic pets should be kept outside the chinchilla unit.

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Section 6 - Transportation of Live Chinchillas

Travelling crates must be adequately designed for transportation by road or air to allow sufficient space, air-flow, and comfort for each animal. Correct documentation, as required, must be prepared.

1. Cages should be of sturdy construction with no sharp materials that may cause injury to the animal or cage handler.
2. Cages can be made to individual specifications with regard to the number of compartments.
3. Extreme care must be taken at all times to allow sufficient air flow. If the air is restricted within the area where the crates are stored, heat will build quickly, and chinchillas, always susceptible to heat exhaustion, may expire or rapidly become ill.

Commercial Transportation

1. Cases should not have any hole larger than one-half (1 /2) inch wide.
2. Cages must have a solid bottom and top.
3. The animal must be provided with some type of bedding.
4. The cage must be large enough for the animal to lie down and turn around, yet not so large that a sudden stop or start would injure the animal. A recommended size is six inches by eight inches by five and one half inches high (6" x 8" x 5-1/2"). For airline travel the height should not exceed eight (8) inches.

Noncommercial Transportation

1. The cage size may vary as the rancher can supervise the handling of the cages.
2. The cage wire mesh size may be larger.

Animal Care In Transport

1. Only one full grown animal or one female with kits under three (3) weeks of age per cage is allowed. If a female has kits over three (3) weeks of age, they may be placed in a cage together beside the mother's cage.
2. If animals are to be in transport for more than twenty-four (24) hours each animal should be given water-soaked grain by the rancher. In such a case the animals should be watered promptly after reaching their destination.

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Section 7 - Euthanasia

Humane death of chinchilla is of paramount importance. Euthanasia. methods must ensure immediate insensitivity to pain without causing fear or anxiety.

There are several types of euthanasia recommended by veterinary associations. The two listed forms of euthanasia, in addition to meeting humane requirements, are found to be safe, practical, reliable, and easy to use with application to chinchilla.

Cervical Dislocation

1. The individual should be comfortable handling chinchillas and fully trained in cervical dislocation.

Electrocution

1. Electrical equipment should be specifically built and properly maintained for optimum effectiveness.

Each type of euthanasia has guidelines recommended by Veterinary Medical Associations. Those guidelines should be strictly adhered to.

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Sample Questions - from Veterinary Inspection Form

A. Accommodation

1. Is there proper equipment in good working condition to maintain a temperature between 55° - 80°F?
2. Does unit layout promote good working conditions?
3. Do cage sizes meet minimum standards?
4. Does the cage design and construction meet minimum standards?
5. Does the cage arrangement allow visual and physical inspection of all areas?
6. Is the quantity of light sufficient?
7. Do the animals observe a day/night light cycle?
8. Does the animal population density meet the requirements?

B. Food and Water

1. Does the rancher know the general nutritional requirement of chinchillas?
2. Is the feed placed in a position where it can easily be reached by the animal?
3. Is feed stored in such a way that it does not become contaminated?
4. Has the rancher established a regular feeding schedule?
5. Are feeders and feeding utensils clean?
6. Is clean safe water available in a position permitting easy access by all animals in the cage?
7. Does the position of the water source allow easy inspection and cleaning by the rancher?
8. Is the schedule for cleaning and maintaining the water system adequate?

C. Health and Disease

1. Is the ranch aware that behavior, droppings, and posture are indicators of health and should be watched closely?
2. Has every effort been made to provide a comfortable environment?
3. Are chinchillas the only animal allowed in the unit?

D. Sanitation

1. Has the rancher set up a regular cleaning schedule?
2. Is there proper ventilation?
3. Has the rancher implemented an effective vector control program?
4. Has the rancher implemented an effective fly control program?

E. Euthanasia

1. Are animals humanely euthanized?

In your opinion, based on your training and experience, does this chinchilla ranch provide humane care for its animals? *

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Certification Procedure

Chinchilla Industry Council, Empress Chinchilla Breeders Cooperative Inc., and National Chinchilla Breeders of Canada, encourages all chinchilla ranchers to manage their ranches in accordance with the Standard Guidelines reproduced herein. When a veterinarian's inspection shows that a ranch meets the guidelines, your breeder organization will certify that the ranch is a well-run, humane enterprise.

If you wish to have your ranch certified and feel that it meets all the standards, please do the following:

1. Contact a veterinarian of your choice who agrees to inspect your ranch. (Any inspection fees are the responsibility of the chinchilla rancher.)
2. Fill out the form on the next page, identifying yourself and your veterinarian, and send it to:

   Your breeder organization will send instructions to the veterinarian you designate.

   The veterinarian who inspects your chinchilla ranch will be asked to notify your breeder organization with the results of the inspection. If the veterinarian reports that your chinchilla ranch complies with all standards, a certificate will be issued by your breeder organization. The certificate is suitable for framing and can be displayed in an appropriate location on your ranch, such as the ranch office, and may be used in advertising.

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Application for Certification of Chinchilla Ranch

(Please type or print)

Name of Chinchilla Rancher_____

Name of Ranch_____

Address of Ranch_____

Tel: (____)_____ Fax: (____)_____

Name of Inspecting Veterinarian_____

Address of Veterinarian_____

Tel: (____)_____ Fax: (____)_____

My chinchilla ranch meets the standards promulgated by these guidelines and I hereby apply for certification.

Signature of Chinchilla Rancher_____

Date_____

Prepared by the following organizations under the auspices of the Chinchilla Industry Council:

Empress Chinchilla Breeders Cooperative Inc.
P.O. Box 318
Sixes, Oregon 97476
U.S.A.

National Chinchilla Breeders of Canada
R.R.# 2
Norval ,Ontario L0P 1K0
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